

ON a cold February evening in 1871 a Mr J. E. Sydenham and a few friends got together at the old Bridge Street Rooms in Reading to talk about forming a new football team.

From their meeting Reading Football Club came into being, and, still going strong in its 106th year, is the seventh oldest in the Football League.

Only Notts County and Preston (formed in 1862), Stoke City (1863), Nottingham Forest (1865), Chesterfield (1866) and Sheffield Wednesday (1867) have been in business longer.

This is Reading's 100th season in the F.A. Cup, and only Notts County of the current league sides have been entering for longer.

In their early days the Reading team changed their home ground pretty frequently. From Reading Recreation Ground they moved to Reading Cricket Ground then on to Coley Park in 1882, and again to Caversham Cricket Ground seven years later. It was necessary to take a ferry across the Thames to see their games at Caversham.

In the 1890's the club began to develop quickly — they joined the Southern League in 1894, turned professional in 1895 and with interest in them growing rapidly, they moved to their present Elm Park headquarters the following year.

Just before they changed

A look back into the history of Reading Football Club

to professional status the club suffered the worst defeat in their history, crashing 18-0 to the great Preston team in the first round of the F.A. Cup in 1893. That still stands as the biggest defeat ever suffered by any of the present 92 League clubs.

Reading's next milestone came in 1920, when the Football League increased its size to take in a Third Division — and Reading quickly joined its South section.

It didn't take them long to make their mark.

In 1925-26, when only one team went up from Division Three South, Reading won the championship — but only after the closest of photo-finishes. Plymouth Argyle needed only to draw their final game at Gillingham to clinch that top spot, while Reading had to beat Brentford and pray that Plymouth would be beaten.

While Plymouth never looked like getting a point at Gillingham, finally going down 2-1, Reading's Frank Richardson and Hugh Davey sent the Elm Park crowd wild with delight by tearing Brentford to pieces.

Richardson scored four times and Davey three as Brentford were thrashed 7-1 and Reading stormed up to Division Two.

But they found the higher grade of football an uphill struggle and the 14th position they achieved in their first season up, is the highest place they have ever reached in the League. After just five seasons in Division Two Reading were relegated — ironically after a 3-1 defeat at the hands of old rivals Plymouth.

While they were a Second Division side, however, Reading had their best-ever F.A. Cup run, winning through to within 90 minutes of a Wembley Final in 1926-7. Weymouth, Southend, Manchester United (after a second replay at Villa Park), Portsmouth, Brentford and Swansea were all knocked out before the eventual winners, Cardiff City, beat them 3-0 in the semi-final at Wolverhampton.

The record Elm Park crowd of 33,042 saw Richardson score the only goal of the game in the fifth round tie against Brentford.

Back in the Third Division, Reading were always one of the strongest sides, four times finishing runners-up before finally getting out after 40 years.

When they did so — in their centenary season 1970-71 — it was at the wrong end, the club sinking into the Fourth Division after losing 2-1 in their final game at Aston Villa when a point would have kept them up.

Match ball

KEEN and Busby Ltd, the sports outfitters, have supplied the match ball for tomorrow's game between Wycombe and Reading.

On radio

THE Wycombe Wanderers v Reading F.A. Cup-tie will be featured on BBC Radio 2 tomorrow (Saturday) afternoon.

* FACTS AND FIGURES *

Reading's record victory since turning professional in 1895 is 10-2 against Crystal Palace in Division Three South during the 1946-47 season.

Dick Spiers holds the record number of appearances for Reading with 453. Dick played from 1955 to 1970 and also turned out in 41 F.A. Cup ties.

Reading's best-ever season in the Football League was in 1926-

27 when they finished 14th in Division Two.

In 1893-94, Reading crashed to their heaviest ever defeat when they fell 18-0 to Preston North End in the first round of the F.A. Cup.

Highest goalscorer in a season at Reading is Ronnie Blackman who grabbed 39 goals for the club in season 1951-52.

Ted Drake and Roy Bentley are

among the list of Reading managers since the war. Others include Joe Edelston, Jack Smith, Harry Johnston and Jack Mansell.

Reading's record transfer fee received for a player was £60,000 by Southampton for winger Tommy Jenkins in 1969.

Pat McConnell is Reading's most capped player. He won eight caps for Ireland.

However, their second spell out of Division Three ended after just five seasons — and ended triumphantly on April 24 this year when a 2-2 draw at Cambridge United ensured Reading the second promotion of their history.

Now they're hoping that history will repeat itself again — and that promotion will be followed by a record Cup run, just as it was half a century ago.

This season started with much promise for Reading but it now seems to be turning sour. The club has been suffering a run of terrible results in the last two months — just when it looked as though they were poised to make a promotion challenge for the second consecutive season. Now manager Charlie Hurley is busily searching for new players to halt the slide.

Although the beginning of their programme was top-heavy with away fixtures, they could have gone to the top of the table if they had won at Peterborough on September 14. They deserved to do just that, but after leading into the second half they eventually lost to the last kick of the game.

However, wins at Northampton and Portsmouth kept them in the picture and then a convincing 4-1 local derby victory over Swindon on October 3 took them up into the promotion trio.

Since that Swindon triumph, however, the bubble has burst in the most dramatic fashion with the result that Reading have taken just three points from their last nine games.

The two months' absence through injury of experienced striker Ray Hiron and the failure of Robin Friday to recapture his consistent scoring form of the last two seasons have proved extremely costly.

Now Reading desperately need new men to improve their position, and they will be much more likely to afford them if they can beat Wycombe Wanderers and earn a third round tie against one of the first division giants.

Reading scored 112 goals in Division Three South during the 1951-52 season — a club record.

In 1927 Reading reached the semi-final of the F.A. Cup. In 1965 and 1966 they reached the fourth round of the League Cup.

Ronnie Blackman holds the Reading record for the greatest number of goals in total aggregate with 156.